



# FLORENCE 2020



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON THE HISTORY OF NURSING

## CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS



Florence, **Italy**

13 • 15 February **2020**

CSF Montedomini  
"Il Fuligno"

Via Faenza, 48

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## **For nurses the century XVII: "Light of medicine, rational practice, and Methodica, nurses guide, beginner's directory"**

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The main change towards the disease at the post-Renaissance period was largely due to the knowledge of anatomy. Disease management and assessment were based on Hippocratic roots in which the reason people fell ill was due to the imbalance between the four temperaments: blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm.

Fighting illness could be achieved by rebalancing the temperaments, through the administration of remedies made out of herbs and other substances in nature, but a strong conviction on superstition remained.

It's in this atmosphere that a book appears, aimed not only for physicians but also for nurses. It's called "Light of Medicine, rational practice, and methodical, nurses guide, beginners directory" [translation from Portuguese], written in Portuguese by the physician Francisco Morato Roma, who had 9 editions between the 17th and 18th centuries and its first edition was in 1664, in Lisbon. Although it's not a textbook exclusively for nurses, it evokes the importance of nurse's role.

The first edition was in 1664 in Lisbon, followed by eight more reissues. The year 1686 stands out, when two editions of the same book are published simultaneously in two cities: Lisbon and Coimbra. On the edition of 1726, the book was expanded with a surgery treatise.

To the original work, throughout the different editions, other treatises and compendiums were added.

We can consider this book of high historical value, not only due to the number of editions - 9 editions of which 8 are posthumous, thus being of great importance in the dissemination of knowledge about diseases and treatments in the 17th and 18th centuries. It was also identified in several Portuguese Apothecaries inventories and in Brazil, through the Order of the Jesuits on that country (Leite, 1953).

"Will the curious reader ask me why I moved to do this brief practice in the Portuguese language?" That's the way Francisco Morato Roma begins his book, in 1664, aimed at "Portuguese-born people, nurses and others who, should not make mistakes in healing the sick as many people do, by wearing a doctor's cap".

The book was written in Portuguese, because Latin textbooks reached only the educated elite and due to the fact, that, a dead language, like Latin, offers few possibilities for innovation. This linguistic option, allowed, the great acceptance of this textbook, justified by the various editions and reissues.

In the prologue to the reader, Morato Roma states that this textbook allows beginners to be aware of Hippocrates and Galen doctrine. As for the nurses, this textbook will allow them how to help the sick in time.

The first edition of this book carries a body of knowledge, from the assessment and management of the sick person, but also what we would now designate as Health Promotion: healthy living habits as well as health conservation and the knowledge to prevent diseases, because the most important was to anticipate diseases.

In this book, Morato Roma establishes the limits of the "professionals" in the art of treating the sick, in which the surgeon is responsible for the interventions of "opening", "cutting" and "sewing" by his hands, to the Apothecaries, the execution and elaboration of syrups and purges and to the Barber, the bleeds. However, fever, which means illness, only the physician has the art necessary to "achieve the health of the sick".

According to the author, this textbook is aimed to everyone in general but specially for nurses who assist the sick, so they will know when to provide the remedies, and for those who live in remote places and who don't have doctors, they can assist the sick as soon as possible.

A surgery book from 1683, said that nurses have to meet four conditions: "mild", "peaceful", "cheerful" and "discreet". In 1712, the first Portuguese dictionary defines Nurse as "the one who is in charge of the infirmary, and the sick" and in turn defines infirmary as "the place where the sick is healed, in a convent, or in a Hospital".

In the book, the first reference to the nurse's role, places him at the same level as the physician, by identifying signs of illness of the sick, regarding to what he calls the "Vital Faculty": "if the pulse is small, and accelerated, it shows weakness in the vital faculty. . . The physician, or nurse, who assists the patient, will be able to know by the signs indicated, in what state the patient is in" (p. 30).

The second reference is already in the second part of the book, in which the nurse's responsibility in providing remedies when prescribed: "they must keep the application of remedies in the time, when it is necessary. ".

For Morato Roma, medicine is divided into three parts: Diathetics; Pharmaceutics and Surgery. The diet is considered the most important dimension to maintain health and to restore it to those who have lost it. In this way, curing diseases, that require medical intervention, is always through diet first, then purging and then bleeding.

Exercise, rest (quietness), the breathable air, the passions of the soul, evacuations and daily retentions are considered necessary needs to preserve life; however, all of them must be in moderation, in order to preserve health, which the author calls precaution. Those things are called unnatural, as they only depend on the subject's will.

The cure of a disease may require the use of iron, fire or medication. Regarding to medication, it may be of two types: interior and exterior. Interior medicines will be those that will be absorbed by the digestive tract, namely syrups and purges. Also included in the interior category are those that introduce liquids, namely enemas and irrigations.

External medicines, on the other hand, consist of baths, washes, greases and plasters, that is, all interventions that are applied externally.

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In order to a better understanding of the disease process, we are presented with the concept of vital faculty, which is what sustains life, and it is preserved through drinking, eating, and other unnatural things. Vital Faculty can be observed if the pulse beats are the same [as the heart], without greater speed than usual and "if there is vividness in the eyes, and a good color in the face ".

In maintaining health or, as Morato Roma says, to maintain the vital faculty, food is necessary, since the forces are conserved with eating

However, he argues that in the situation of illness, the patient's habits should be changed very little, because "the sudden changes can make a lot of damage", the habits must be maintained before the disease regarding to sleep, exercise, air, and the daily bowel movements. Still regarding food, it should not only import the quantity, but also the quality

As for the ingestion of liquids, he says that they serve to dilute food and to "erase dryness"; this should only be done with water, because it's not a nutrition. Drinks that are not used as food are used in the medical field, as is the case of herbs boiled in water, herbal juices and syrups. Wine, milk and broths are food drinks. Still regarding wine, it can be drunk diluted in water or pure, for those who are not satisfied with just water.

Not only food is responsible for maintaining good health, but sleep, rest and activity. With the recommendation that when the body is tired should rest and after meals should, move because movement "helps in the distribution of food" and "shaking the moods" and is very important for maintaining health.

The religious dimension is present throughout the entire book, since its dedication to Holy Mary, allusions to the designs of God as well as in what concerns to venereal diseases, since they result from activities that go against the laws of God.

## Conclusion

Throughout the writings, expressions such as "knowing the customs and habits of the sick and their family" are common, leading us to what we now call the holistic care of individuals and families, in a given socio-cultural context. This is, without a doubt, a predecessor view for personalized health care nowadays.

The textbook parts and chapters resembles current medical encyclopedic books aimed at laypeople, on the other hand it gathers information for those who are very familiar with the disease processes. However, on this book, that aims to be a reference based on scientific knowledge, the transition between superstition, disease and the scientific perspective can't be established in an exact way.

This book portrays a current knowledge from an Era. It's the first textbook written also for nurses in Portugal regarding medical and health issues

Finally, in addition to being an important medical compendium, it exceeds the professional public, as, as the author states in its first edition: "A very useful work , and necessary , not only for the Professors of Art of Medicine, and Surgery, but also for all family men; for the poor and rich people be able to benefit, in the absence of educated doctors "(Roma, 1753, cover).

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